



EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



226390

Tribune panoramic photo by Alex Garcia

This curious and scraggly patch of land just east of Lake Shore Drive and on the south bank of the Chicago River has been called "a nest of contradictions and possibility."

# 3 untamed acres

What to do with one of Chicago's most important — and oddest — parcels of undeveloped property?

By David Jackson  
Tribune staff reporter

Nearly every day, she passed it on her way to work. Strewn with litter and tangled in weeds, the slip of vacant land juts into the lake at the northern lip of the Chicago River, just east of Lake Shore Drive.

As cars rushed by and gulls wheeled overhead, Laurie Palmer watched Chicago's seasons transform the secluded meadow from matted brown to a deep, tranquil green.

An artist and associate professor at the School of the Art Institute, Palmer brought fresh eyes to the patch of untamed land officially called DuSable Park, but also known as one of Chicago's most important parcels of undeveloped property.

Hidden from view and barely accessible amid a densely packed residential-hotel-entertainment-retail district, the undeveloped park remains, in Palmer's

words, "a nest of contradictions and possibility."

Filing Freedom of Information requests, researching land records and interviewing key players, Palmer reconstructed the park's sad and curious history. Then she invited proposals for its future from artists, local civic activists and urban planners from around the world.

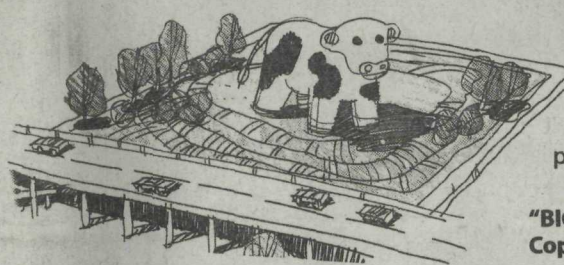
Palmer has gathered 64 of those submissions in a handsome, thought-provoking book, "3 Acres on the Lake: DuSable Park Proposal Project."

Sometimes whimsical and often visionary, many of the proposals stand alone as artworks.

In an accompanying narrative, Palmer traces her own path from artist to social activist who kindled a broader conversation about how Chicago might reclaim the land as a cherished public place.

"Sometimes our sense of shared space comes about

PLEASE SEE **DUSABLE PARK**, PAGE 4



## Vision quest

From the whimsical to the practical, here are three of the 64 park proposals. For more, see Page 4.

### "BIG COW COUNTRY" Copley Wolff Design Group

"Not many people think, or maybe even know, about this site. ... How about a cow? ... That would get people's attention. ... Imagine the discussion. ... Hopefully in all this uproar, the citizenry and their officials will take the time to really consider the merits of the site."

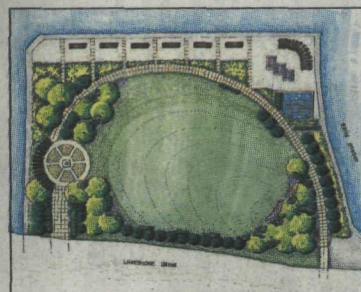
### "DUSABLE PARK" Sujin Kim

"The site itself should intrigue curiosity, providing different perspective views from different directions, holding some delightful features in secret."

### "DAUGHTERS OF DUSABLE: RETIREMENT LODGE FOR LESBIAN WOMEN OF ALL COLORS." Anna Horvath

"The Lodge is built to resemble a giant bathtub as a gentle referral to a well-known line from lesbian songwriter Chris Williamson's '70s song ..."

Images courtesy of DuSable Park Proposal Project



## DANCE REVIEW

# Hubbard Street's 'Rooster' worth crowing about



Jay Franke and Erin Derstine in Hubbard Street Dance Chicago's new work "Rooster."

By Sid Smith  
Tribune arts critic

The shock of recognition is as important in dance as in other arts, and nobody is more recognizable than certain '60s goliaths: Elvis, the Beach Boys, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

When they sing, we're in an instant comfort zone. The challenge for a choreographer lucky and foolish enough to set a dance on any of them is to avoid the obvious and escape a mindless, "Hullabaloo"-like videoland: a drippy trip in time back to psychedelics, go-go boots and frugs.

Christopher Bruce's ingenious "Rooster," set to a handful of Rolling Stones classics, getting its local premiere during the Hubbard Street Dance Chicago engagement at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, slinks and slides in the opposite direction. He takes the preening, lippy,

bad-boy image of the group and the freewheeling chaos of the music and unearths sophistication, wit, subtlety and telltale detail.

Who knew the Stones were perfect for a mock minuet, a balletic solo with radiant leaps and pirouettes or a saucy duet armed with a feathery boa? One reason "Rooster" works so well, and it works sublimely well, is that Bruce never looks down on the material. Instead, he fashions a cool scenario, lean in look and riddled with choreographic color, centered around a playground of schoolyard rivalries and romances dashed by (mostly male) ego.

Artfully blending hip swagger and ersatz baroque, Bruce also develops his own odd gestural grace notes, from the rooster-like strut of the men to the way they keep adjusting their ties in sexual bravado. Or even more quirky:

PLEASE SEE **HUBBARD**, PAGE 11

## INSIDE TEMPO

### ASK AMY

## Marriage or bust



Your husband of 11 years is going to strip clubs and frequenting Internet porn sites. You're hot on his paper and cyber trails. Your next step should be to:

**A.** Change your name to Bond, Jane Bond, and continue covert operations.

**B.** Encourage him to come clean.

**C.** Put all your energy into fixing or ending your marriage. **PAGE 2**



## DUSABLE PARK: An effort to tame 3 vacant acres

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

because we all live in a neighborhood together," said Eleanor Roemer, general counsel for the advocacy group Friends of the Parks. Palmer, by contrast, drew a virtual community to the neglected park. "Even though none of us live or play there, she brought us together around it," Roemer said. "She stimulated interest in the park, and her artistic challenge brought people forward."

Palmer, who currently lives in the Boston area as part of a yearlong Radcliffe Institute fellowship, has taught in the Art Institute school's sculpture department since 1997. She has been involved in housing activism and anti-gentrification work in Uptown, where she lived for years, and her individual and collaborative work often explores notions of land as a raw material and cultural commodity.

From the pedestrian walkway beneath Lake Shore Drive, she studied the wilderness hemmed by a chain-link fence. The stubby peninsula reminded Palmer of a meadow behind her childhood home — she imagined tumbling down its hills and landing in solitude amid hay smells and water sounds.

### Answering a curiosity

"I was curious about why this beautiful space wasn't being filled in," she says. "I thought the park was beautiful the way it was," Palmer says. "I was interested in its state of limbo, but I knew it wouldn't stay that way."

The earth's humble story was told in government records and interviews.

In 1988, Mayor Harold Washington dedicated the site as a park commemorating 18th Century settler Jean Baptiste Point du Sable. But because of bureaucratic inertia and competing budget priorities, the Park District took until 1999 to complete preliminary plans for a waterfront walkway with benches and fountains.

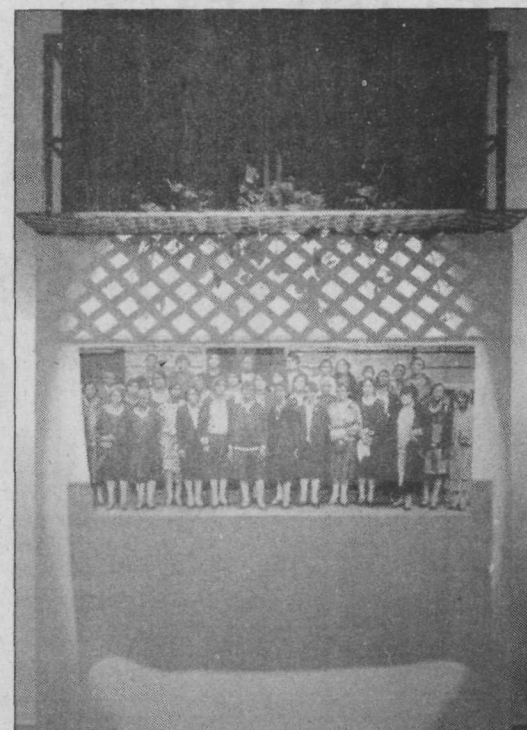
With little progress being made, 42nd Ward Ald. Burton Natarus in 2000 supported a construction company's proposal to pave the site for a temporary 350-car parking lot. Natarus reversed course following an outcry from park proponents. But later that year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency discovered radioactive thorium in the soil — most likely the residue of dumping by a defunct gas lantern manufacturer.

Due in part to wrangling between the EPA and former property owner Kerr-McGee Corp. over how widespread the contamination was and who should pay for disposing of it, the cleanup was not completed until last year.

Meanwhile, the Art Institute's Ferguson Fund commissioned renowned sculptor Martin Puryear to create a statue honoring du Sable, and he exhibited graceful designs to community groups and, following revisions, at Donald Young Gallery last year.

Some civic groups held out for a realistic rendition of the man considered Chicago's first non-native settler. As progress stalled, the debate took on racial overtones.

In an art project that would span four years,



"DUSABLE PARK/REMEMBER THE LADIES"  
Esther Parada

"In addition to marking du Sable's importance, I would choose to have this park honor the group of Chicago women who first brought his name to the attention of the general public."

Palmer depicted the park's contentious cultural landscape, and created a back channel for dialogue about its future. She sought proposals for the land from parks advocates and community groups dedicated to du Sable's legacy. She held artists workshops and posted invitations on Web sites for architects and urban planners.

Palmer offered no money, had no official sanction and held out no hope that proposals would be implemented. But submissions came in from across Chicago and the U.S., as well as from Zurich, London and Guadalajara, among eight other foreign cities.

### Look, but don't touch

Anxious about the land's toxic legacy, several contributors suggested suspended walkways that would allow people to enjoy the meadow without touching it. An architectural planner for Walgreens Co. was among those who drew split-level sites.

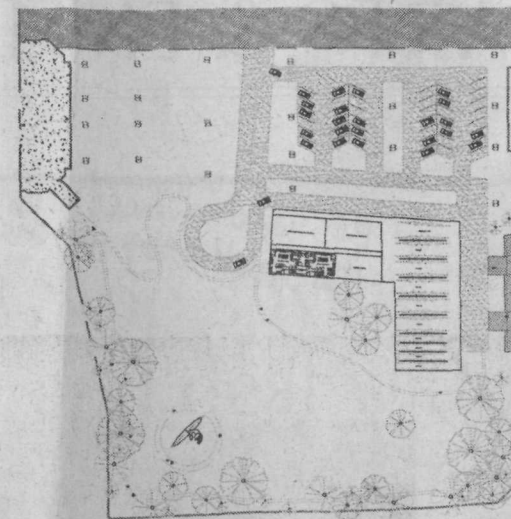
UIC photography professor Esther Parada imagined a garden weaving the vegetables grown by the women who founded the DuSable Society in 1928.

Chicagoan Robert Wolf sketched a fortlike recreation of du Sable's trading post, with a screen of poplars shielding visitors from traffic.

Several proposals were drafted with tongue in cheek. Anna Horvath's cheerful collage depicts a bathtub-shaped "retirement lodge for lesbian women of all colors."

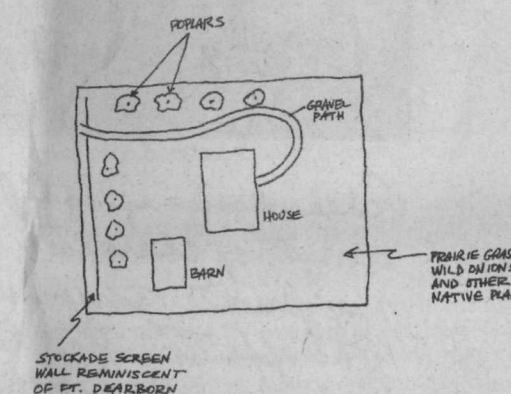
Taking a poke at the affluent Streeterville and New East Side residents whose freshly built homes crowd around the park, members of the artists group Temporary Services proposed a high-rise garbage landfill that might force the wealthy to confront their waste.

Designers commissioned by the Chicago Riv-



"JEAN BAPTISTE POINTE DUSABLE  
RIVER CENTER AT DUSABLE PARK"  
Chicago River Rowing & Paddling Center

"We propose that the park be comprised of three elements: a large-scale statue of du Sable, an interpretive center and boathouse and an interpretive trail of indigenous plantings and historic and current-day information elements."



"PROPOSAL FOR DUSABLE PARK"  
Robert Wolf

"As both a testament to the man du Sable and to the development of the city that began with him, I propose constructing a re-creation of a homestead from the earliest period of settlement."

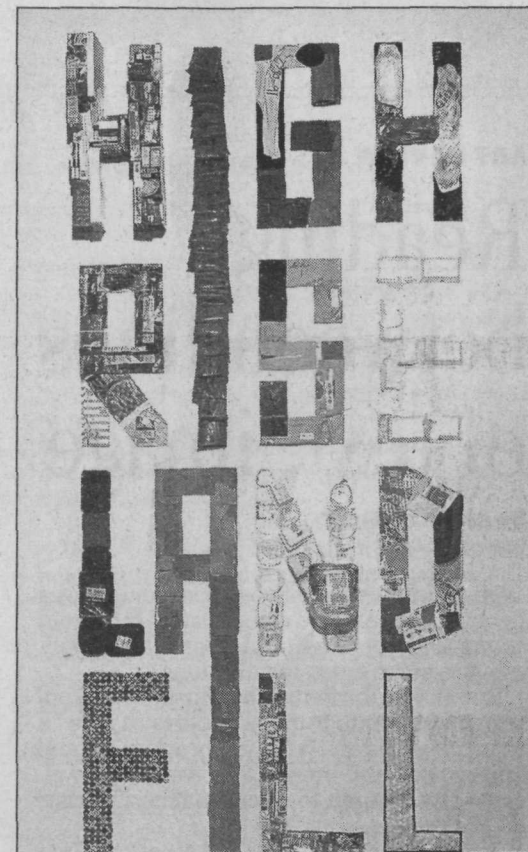
er Rowing & Paddling Center proposed using the calm and protective waters of the Ogden Slip for a recreational paddle sports facility to honor du Sable, who arrived by canoe.

Several submissions presented ways to return the site to its primeval, prairie state.

Palmer says she tried to involve Park District officials, but they did not respond to her invitations. Bob Foster, the Park District's project manager for DuSable Park, said the Park District plans to incorporate Puryear's vision and concepts for the park, but has not settled on a specific design for the park or the monument to du Sable.

The Park District also has not determined how much it will cost to develop the park, but it will clearly be in the millions of dollars and require privately raised financing as well as public funds, park officials and advocates said.

Friends of the Parks is hoping that the Park District Capital Improvement Budget — which



"HIGH RISE LAND FILL"  
Brett Bloom and Salem Collo-Julin

"Streeterville, the community that surrounds this land, is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the country. ... Wealthy people tend to generate more trash than poor people. ... Until people have a clear sense of the consequence of their consumption, they will continue to produce excessive amounts of waste. A High Rise Land Fill in every neighborhood would provide a concrete experience of a community's collective waste production."

was scheduled to be finalized Wednesday — will include at least \$500,000 for a design and engineering study that would allow civic leaders to know how much private money should be raised to develop DuSable Park. Park District spokesman Julian Green said the park is an "important" project, but Green said he could not comment on whether funding for its design would be included in the upcoming budget. "It's something we're considering," Green said.

While advocates eagerly await release of the Park District's Capital Improvement Budget, Palmer's recently published book celebrates the power of art to shape a larger civic conversation.

"I would like to think that it has contributed some momentum to the pragmatic politics of making this park happen," Palmer says. "I would like to think that art can have a reverberating effect."

"3 Acres on the Lake: DuSable Park Proposal Project" is available at Quimby's bookstore (1854 W. North Ave., 773-342-0910) and Gallery 312 (312 N. May St., 773-942-2500), or can be ordered by sending a \$12 check or money order to White Walls, P.O. Box 8204, Chicago, IL 60680. Palmer's Web site on the project is posted at <http://www.artic.edu/~apalme/>